

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Re-Evaluation

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) is re-evaluating options for providing drainage service to the San Luis Unit (SLU) (see Figure 1-1). The re-evaluation will allow Reclamation to formulate and implement a plan that provides agricultural drainage service to the SLU that achieves long-term, sustainable salt and water balance in the root zone of irrigated lands.

The history of Reclamation's attempts to provide drainage service to the SLU is punctuated by a series of litigations, the most recent of which (Sumner Peck Ranch, Inc. et al. v. Bureau of Reclamation, et al.) compels Reclamation to provide drainage service to the SLU promptly. In response to the court's order, Reclamation developed a Plan of Action that outlines its proposed efforts to provide prompt drainage service.

1.1.2 Preliminary Alternatives Report

This Preliminary Alternative Report (Report) is the product of the first phase of the re-evaluation effort which includes the formulation of preliminary alternatives and initial public scoping. This Report is consistent with the Plan of Action and identifies preliminary alternatives that meet the court's order to provide prompt drainage service to the SLU. Reclamation has considered a wide range of screening criteria to yield the greatest number of alternatives for evaluation. Alternatives described in this report meet the court order and use proven technology.

The Report contains a mix of historic, technical, and public outreach information, including the following:

- History of SLU issues
- Project description
- Assessment of the drainage need
- Plan formulation and approach
- Description of drainage service options
- Description of preliminary drainage service alternatives
- Report on current public scoping efforts

The final section of the Report summarizes the public scoping efforts and outlines the strategies Reclamation will use during 2002 to combine stakeholder input and technical information for screening alternatives. Reclamation has learned through the public scoping process that collaborating with stakeholders while collecting technical data on each option is the best approach for developing a workable drainage plan. This strategy will allow Reclamation to develop various drainage service alternatives and identify the preferred

**Figure 1-1. San Luis Drainage Feature Re-evaluation
Study Area**



alternative that meets the drainage needs of the SLU, complies with the court order, and garners stakeholder support.

Reclamation is conducting an open evaluation process that encourages public comments as decisions are made. Public input will assist Reclamation in refining alternatives presented in this Report as we proceed into the next phase of the re-evaluation.

1.2 Historical Perspective

Planning for drainage facilities to serve the San Joaquin Valley (Valley) has occurred since the mid-1950s. Drainage facilities were discussed when Reclamation studied the feasibility of water supply development for the SLU. In the 1957 California Water Plan, the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) also planned for drainage facilities from near the Buena Vista lakebed in Tulare Basin to the Delta. Table 1-1 provides a chronological list of events for San Joaquin Valley drainage planning.

In 1960, Congress enacted Public Law 86-488 authorizing construction of the SLU of the Central Valley Project (CVP). Reclamation participated with the State of California (State) in constructing the San Luis Interceptor Drain (Drain) to serve the needs of the SLU. Also in 1960, California voters approved the Burns-Porter Act authorizing the State Water Project to build facilities to remove drainage water from the Valley. The State initially participated in the joint planning of the master drain but withdrew in 1964 for lack of funding.

In the early 1960s, the plan for the Drain changed from an unlined ditch to a concrete-lined canal. Later, a flow-regulatory reservoir (Kesterson Reservoir) was added. In 1968, Reclamation began construction of the San Luis Interceptor Drain and the first stage of Kesterson Reservoir. By 1975, an 82-mile segment of the Drain (ending at Kesterson Reservoir) was complete, and 120 miles of collector drains had been constructed in a 42,000-acre area of the northeast portion of Westlands Water District (WWD).

TABLE 1-1
Chronological Events for Valley Drainage Planning

Date	Event
1956	The feasibility report for water supply development for the SLU includes plans for drainage facilities.
1957	California Water Plan discusses master drainage facilities.
1960	San Luis Act authorizes construction of the SLU, with drainage provided either by participating with the State in a master drain or constructing the San Luis Drain.
1960	Burns-Porter Act authorizes State Water Project financing for master drain.
1962	Plans for the drain are revised to a concrete-lined canal.
1964	Plans are again revised to include a flow regulatory reservoir (Kesterson).
1964	State withdraws from joint planning for master drain because of lack of funding.
1965	Because of environmental concerns, Congress prohibits selection of final discharge point for San Luis Drain until a plan conforms to the water quality standards of California as approved by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

TABLE 1-1
Chronological Events for Valley Drainage Planning

Date	Event
1968-75	Construction begins on San Luis Drain, completing an 82-mile segment of the drain, and 120 miles of collector drains. Federal budget constraints and environmental concerns halt work on Kesterson and the drain.
1976	Kesterson lands, including the first stage of Kesterson Reservoir, become part of national wildlife refuge system.
1975-79	San Joaquin Valley Interagency Drainage Program formed to find a solution to valley drainage problems. Recommends completing a drain to discharge point in the Delta near Chipps Island.
1980-84	San Luis Unit Special Study begins to fulfill requirements for a discharge permit from the SWRCB.
1983	Deformities and death of aquatic birds discovered at Kesterson Reservoir.
1984-90	San Joaquin Valley Drainage Program established to investigate drainage problems and possible solutions. Recommended plan focused on "in-valley solutions."
1985	Kesterson Reservoir/San Luis Drain closed.
1986	Barcellos judgment reached, addressing water supply and drainage service provisions to WWD.
1989-91	San Luis Unit Drainage Program started in response to Barcellos judgment. Recommended alternative includes land retirement, source control, limited discharge to the San Joaquin River, and treatment and disposal.
1991	San Joaquin Valley Drainage Implementation Program forms to implement recommendations from the San Joaquin Valley Drainage Program.
1992	Barcellos Plan rejected. Sumner Peck litigation filed.
1995	District Court judgment entered.
February 2000	Appeals Court opinion issued.
December 2000	Revised court order issued.

Between 1975 and 1979, the San Joaquin Valley Interagency Drainage Program (IDP), a joint effort of Reclamation, the DWR, and the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB), was formed to find an economically, environmentally, and politically acceptable solution to Valley drainage problems. This group recommended that a drain be completed to the Delta, terminating near Chipps Island. The State again declined to participate in a master drain and, based on the IDP's recommendation, Reclamation initiated a special study to fulfill the requirements for a discharge permit from the SWRCB for a federal-only Drain.

In 1983, discovery of embryonic deformities of aquatic birds at Kesterson Reservoir significantly changed the approach to drainage solutions in the Valley. Because of the high selenium levels found in the drainage water and its effects at Kesterson Reservoir, the SLU special study was suspended. In 1985, following a Nuisance and Abatement Order issued by the SWRCB, discharges to Kesterson Reservoir were halted, and feeder drains leading to the Drain were plugged.

In response to the Kesterson problems, the San Joaquin Valley Drainage Program (SJVDP) was formed by the governor of California and the secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior. This joint federal/state effort was established to develop solutions to drainage and drainage-related problems. While the initial efforts looked at all possible solutions, a policy decision in 1987 limited studies to in-valley drainage management measures based on a recommendation from a citizens advisory committee consisting of water users, environmental advocates, and public interests. The SJVDP's final report recommended an in-valley solution that included source reduction, drainage reuse, land retirement, evaporation ponds, groundwater management, San Joaquin River discharge, and institutional changes. This plan provided a strategy for managing salts through 2040 and stated that eventually salts may need to be removed from the Valley.

While the SJVDP was preparing its recommendations, a 1986 federal court order settled a lawsuit between WWD, Reclamation, and various classes of landowners and water users in WWD. Named after one of the parties to the lawsuit, the Barcellos Judgment addressed, among other things, the supply of water to WWD and the provision of drainage service to WWD. It directed Reclamation to develop, adopt, and submit to WWD a plan for drainage service facilities by the end of 1991, leading to preparation of the SLU Drainage Program Plan Formulation document and the related environmental impact statement.

Several landowners subsequently sued the U.S. department of the Interior (Interior), seeking completion of the master drain to the Delta. These lawsuits were partially consolidated in 1992 to address the common allegation that Interior was required by law to construct drainage service facilities from certain lands in the SLU. In 1995, the district court issued a partial judgment stating that the San Luis Act established a mandatory duty to provide drainage. The judgment ordered Interior to promptly prepare, file, and pursue an application for a discharge permit with the SWRCB. Interior appealed this judgment.

In February 2000, the U.S. Court of Appeals concluded that Interior must provide drainage service but held that Interior could meet the court order with a plan other than the interceptor drain solution.